

## Advent from a Vincentian Perspective, Part 1: Active Waiting and Christian Hope

Advent marks the beginning of the liturgical year, a time of spiritual renewal and preparation for the coming of Christ. This season invites us to step into a space of “active waiting”— a term that encapsulates the dual call to watchfulness and action. From a Vincentian perspective, Advent not only reflects the broader Christian themes of hope and expectation but also challenges us to live these virtues in a concrete, transformative way, particularly in our service on behalf the poor.



### Active Waiting: More Than Passive Expectation

In the Vincentian tradition, the concept of waiting is deeply intertwined with action. St. Vincent de Paul famously emphasized that love is not love unless it is effective. For him, waiting for Christ’s coming wasn’t a passive endeavor but one of active engagement with the world, especially through service on behalf of those most in need.

In one of his letters, St. Vincent remarked: “Let us love God, ... let us love God. But let it be with the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brow.” (CCD XI:32.) This statement encapsulates the Vincentian ethos, which calls us to live our faith through action. As we prepare for the birth of Christ during Advent, this means actively seeking out Christ in the poor, the suffering, and the marginalized.

Advent, in this sense, becomes a time of reawakening to the needs of the world around us, inviting us to ask ourselves: How can we make room for Christ in our lives by serving others? How are we preparing our hearts not just through prayer and reflection but also through concrete acts of mercy and justice?

## Christian Hope: Rooted in Love and Service

At the heart of Advent lies the theme of hope—a hope that is not abstract or distant but deeply grounded in the reality of Christ’s incarnation. The Vincentian charism, too, finds its core in hope, particularly in the belief that Christ is present in the poor. This presence transforms both the giver and the receiver of service. For St. Vincent, to serve the poor was to serve Christ Himself. He famously said: “If we go to the poor ten times a day, ten times a day we will find God there!” (CCD IX:199.) This profound statement underscores the mystery of the Incarnation, which we prepare for during Advent. Christ did not come as a powerful ruler but as a vulnerable infant, born into poverty. As we prepare for His coming again, we are reminded that Christ continues to come to us in the distressing disguise of the poor.

Christian hope, from a Vincentian perspective, is not merely a vague anticipation of future happiness but a deep trust in God’s ongoing work in the world, particularly through our hands and hearts. Advent is a season where this hope is renewed, not just in personal piety but in communal service.

## Seeing Christ in the Poor

One of the most striking aspects of St. Vincent de Paul’s spiritual legacy is his insistence that the poor are not simply recipients of charity but living icons of Christ. This is a radical vision, particularly for our times, where poverty is often invisible or reduced to statistics. Advent invites us to re-encounter Christ in the poor and to recognize His face in those who are marginalized, forgotten, or oppressed.

St. Vincent reminds us of the dignity of the poor, stating: “Let us acknowledge before God that they are our lords and masters and that we are unworthy of rendering them our little services.” (CCD XI:349) This is a humbling truth, especially during Advent when we are called to prepare our hearts to receive Christ. How can we truly welcome Christ if we neglect Him in the person of the poor? How can we celebrate His birth while ignoring the cries of those who suffer?

In a sense, Advent becomes a mirror through which we can examine our relationship with the poor. Are we truly seeing Christ in them, as St. Vincent urges us to do? Are we serving them with the reverence and love that such recognition demands? These questions are at the heart of a Vincentian Advent, calling us not only to reflect but to act.

## Spiritual Preparation: Beyond the Material

The consumer-driven world often distracts us from the true purpose of Advent. The season can become more about preparing for celebrations, decorations, and gifts than about preparing our hearts for the coming of Christ. St. Vincent de Paul's emphasis on simplicity and humility is a necessary corrective to this modern-day distortion.

St. Vincent challenges us to prepare spiritually. Advent is a time to strip away our pride, our distractions, and our self-centeredness, so that we can make room for Christ to enter into our hearts and our lives. This spiritual preparation is not just about personal holiness but also about preparing ourselves to serve others more effectively.

## A Call to Action

Advent, from a Vincentian perspective, is both a time of spiritual renewal and a call to action. It invites us to actively wait for Christ by serving those in need, to live in Christian hope by seeing Christ in the poor, and to prepare ourselves spiritually for His coming. In a world that often prioritizes materialism and self-interest, the Vincentian charism reminds us that true preparation for Christ's coming involves both prayer and service.

One practical way to engage in this spiritual preparation is through the Vincentian practice of daily reflection. By taking time each day to examine our actions and intentions, we can become more aware of how we are (or are not) living the values of the Gospel. This practice helps us to stay grounded in the true meaning of Advent, even as the world around us pulls us in other directions.

As we journey through this Advent season, let us take to heart the words of St. Vincent de Paul, who constantly urged his followers to live their faith in tangible ways. Let us make this time not just a season of anticipation but also a season of transformation, both in our own hearts and in the world around us.

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## Questions for Personal and Community Reflection

1. How am I actively preparing for Christ's coming, not just spiritually but also through concrete actions of service?
2. In what ways do I recognize Christ in the poor, and how can I deepen my commitment to serving Him through them?
3. How can our community better embody the Vincentian spirit of humility, simplicity, and service during this Advent season?